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THE CONVERT:

OR, AN

APOLOGY for the CONDUCT OF A YOUNG GENTLEMAN,

WHO,

By attending the *Sunday* Evening Lectures of a celebrated Preacher, was convinced of the Errors he had imbibed in his Education, and became a DISSENTER.

In a Series of LETTERS from the YOUNG CONVERT to his UNCLE, a *Church of England* Clergyman, in the Country.

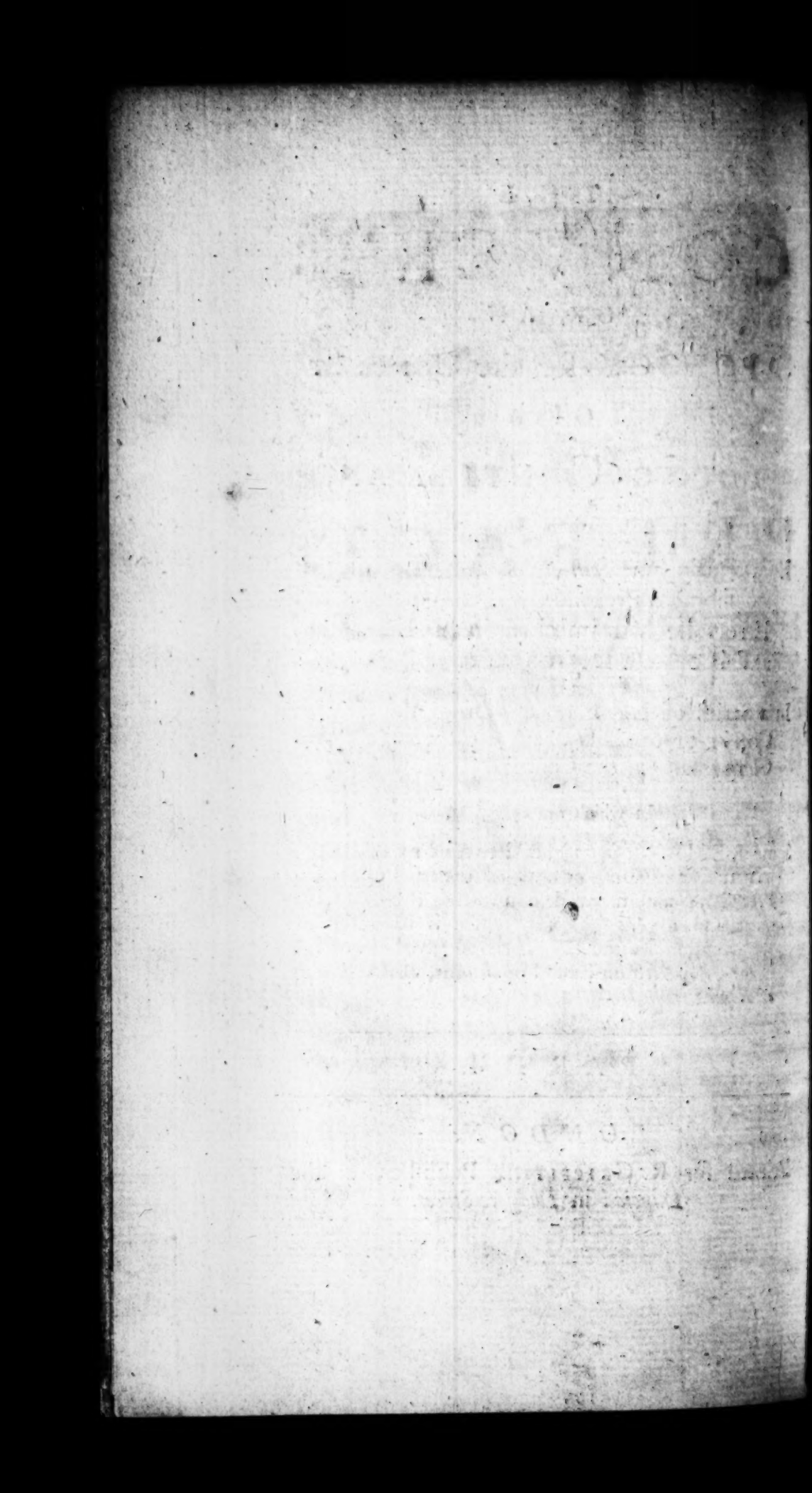
In which are contained,

Some REMARKS on the CHARACTER, PRINCIPLES, and ORATORY, of the said celebrated Preacher; and many demonstrative Proofs of the great and urgent Necessity there is of a further Reformation in the *Church of England*, from the Errors, Superstitions, and Impositions, of the *Church of Rome*.

PART I.

LONDON:

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THE PREFACE.

I HAVE not been induced to publiſh the following Letters by any Ambition of being thought an Author; a Title which I can neither think myſelf qualify'd to bear, nor ſuppoſe that any one, intimately acquainted with me, can think ſo, as knowing that my Education has not been equal to any literary Attempt. Taken early from School, and engag'd in Purſuits which have afforded me but little Leiſure for Reading, (to which, indeed, I was naturally inclin'd, tho' my Inclinations have been forc'd into a very different Channel) all the Knowledge I acquir'd while under the Controul of others, was how to cultivate the Means and Opportunities that might beſt contribute to furniſh every thing for gratifying the Senſes,

and ſupplying the outward Conveniences of Life; but the Cultivation of the Mind was never ſet down among the Requiſites to form the Man of Buſineſs.

But ſince Providence has been pleaſed to awaken me to a juſt Senſe of the Dignity of my reaſonable Nature, I have employ'd the little Leiſure I could procure, in reading a few ſelect Authors, who have, I hope, put me in the Way of thinking juſtly and rationally on common Subjects, and enabled me to form a right Judgment of the great Truths of Religion and Morality, and to diſtinguiſh them from the Errors, Caprices, and Impoſitions of irrational or inſincere Men.

The Occaſion of theſe Letters being wrote may be ſeen in the Beginning of the firſt; but the Cauſe of their Publication is the ſtrange Behaviour of the reverend Gentleman to whom they are addreſs'd; who, inſtead of making a proper Reply to them either ſingly, as they came to Hand, or after the Series was compleated, ungenerouſly made it his Buſineſs to turn them into Ridicule, among all my numerous Relations and Friends in the Country, miſrepreſenting many Paſſages, and even pretending to cite Words and Expreſſions which are not in the Letters, unleſs interpolated by another Hand.

What

What he chiefly aim'd at, by taking theſe unbecoming Methods to deſtroy my Reputation, I will not pretend to determine; but at preſent ſhall content myſelf with publickly calling upon him to do me Juſtice as publickly. Nay, he muſt at leaſt do me this Piece of Juſtice even if he continues ſilent, viz. *of owning that the following Letters are genuine Copies of thoſe he received from me: For this he cannot poſſibly diſprove.*

Let him alſo give his Reaſons for not fairly communicating my Letters to certain Perſons to whom he read Extracts from them, commenting as he read, forcing Meanings that were never meant, and pretending to read Words and Pieces of Sentences that were never written by me: Let him ſay why he refuſed to gratify one of the ſeveral Perſons who preſs'd him to let them read *the Letters* themſelves, *or at leaſt thoſe Paſſages which, in Truth, they ſuſpected he miſrepreſented by* his *unfair Readings.*

Let him alſo aſſign ſome better Reaſon for his never ſending me his general Anſwer *to all my Letters on the Subject in Queſtion, which he promiſed to ſend me: And why, inſtead of keeping his Promiſe, he thought proper to declare, that he never would write to me again:*

Let

Let him, I ſay, aſſign ſome better Reaſon than " *that I was fallen beneath his Notice, not* " *only on Account of my* Folly, *but my Inſo-* " *lence, in treating both him and the* Church, " *which was a double Affront, as reſpecting* " *both his Perſon and Character, with moſt* " *inſufferable ill Manners.*" — *But if this be be true, why has he not yet produced the ill-manner'd Paſſages he complains of? I abſolutely deny the Charge, and appeal to the Letters themſelves, and to the Judgment of the impartial Reader.*

I wiſh I could account for this odd Treatment from a Gentleman for whom I ever had a great Veneration, by any thing more certain than a meer Conjecture; but ſince I cannot, I muſt beg Leave to lay my Conjecture before him: viz. *That this ſeeming Reſentment of Affronts never receiv'd, is only a Cloak to cover his Inability to overturn my Principles: An Inability which I believe him conſcious of, and, doubtleſs, 'tis Prudence in him not to enter the Liſts againſt Truth. But then I am ſorry that he had not Ingenuity enough to make a handſome Excuſe, and continue in Charity with me. This would not only have ſecur'd to him the Continuance of my Eſteem and Reſpect, but have prevented my falling into the diſagreeable Dilemma of either publiſhing his ungenerous*

generous Uſage, or ſuffering his Malice *(I am ſorry I cannot find a ſofter Term) to triumph on the Ruins of my Reputation: Which, however, I cannot prevent from ſuffering in another reſpect; for while I clear myſelf from his Aſperſions, I ſhall be cenſur'd as a bad Writer. Nevertheleſs, this will not give me much Concern, ſince it is not to prove my Abilities as an Author, that I appear in Print, but to vindicate my Character and Principles as a Chriſtian. If I make it appear, that my Heart and Intentions are yet as honeſt as, I believe, they were formerly thought to be, and that I have not quite ſtray'd from the Paths of Common Senſe, I ſhall gain my Point, which is only to be reinſtated in the good Opinion of thoſe Friends who have been unreaſonably prejudiced againſt me, and from whom I am too diſtant to be reconciled by a perſonal Eccleirciſſement. As to the Faults that may be found with my Style and Diction, and thoſe Things that* Authors *and Criticks are ſo exact about, I ſhall attend very little to them. I have not ſign'd my Name at length, and therefore none will find me out but thoſe who I deſire ſhould be in the Secret; and they, I doubt not, will think I have acquitted myſelf as well as could be expected, conſidering my ſuperficial Education, and the few Opportunities I have had for Improvements in Literature. If I write*

tolerable

tolerable Engliſh, *'tis all I aim at. Beſides, I am prevented from making my Letters ſo fit for the Preſs as I could have done, had I not been tied down to print only cloſe verbal Copies of what had been familiarly written to a private Perſon, and not intended for publick Inſpection.*

But, after all, I cannot ſay but I am, in ſome Meaſure, glad that I have been obliged to publiſh my Letters; ſince I have thus met with an unexpected Opportunity of contributing my Mite towards clearing my Religion from the Aſperſions and Miſrepreſentations of thoughtleſs Zealots, and artful worldly-minded Men, who, I fear, care leſs for real Religion *than for the Emoluments of* Church-Power.

How the Diſſenters may approve what I have done, I know not. I never communicated to any body one Word of what I wrote, nor ever aſk'd the Opinion of any Diſſenter or other Perſon whatever: Nay more, I ſolemnly declare, I never in my Life convers'd with a Diſſenter on the Subject of the Difference between the Eſtabliſh'd and Diſſenting Churches. Neither am I in the leaſt known to more than one Diſſenting Miniſter, and with him my Acquaintance is ſo ſlight, that he, I am ſure, knows nothing of my religious Sentiments, nor

whether

whether I am a Member of the Church of England, *or a Diſſenter; nor what Profeſſion I was brought up in, or whether I am not now the ſame I was brought up to be. In a Word, he knows nothing of me but my Face, and that only from my having been once in his Company about Half an Hour; ſince which, knowing me again, we ſalute each other on meeting in the Streets, or elſewhere, and this is the greateſt Intimacy ſubſiſting betwixt us.*

If any one has a real Cauſe to be offended with aught I have ſaid in the following Letters, it is that excellent, and, I am perſuaded, extremely modeſt, Perſon, who, tho' unconſcious of it, has been the Inſtrument of my Converſion. I humbly aſk this Gentleman's Pardon for making ſo free a Uſe of his Name, and dwelling ſo minutely on his Character; and I hope he will think me the more excuſable, as being irreſiſtably impell'd by ſuch affectionate Regards for him, as I have neither Ability nor Inclination to ſet Bounds to. So warm an Attachment to one that I am utterly unknown to, may perhaps appear extravagant to People of a colder Diſpoſition than mine; but, for my Part, I ſhould like myſelf the worſe, were I more indifferent in any good Cauſe than I generally find myſelf. I neither love nor hate any Thing by Halves. Whatever is great, and

good, and virtuous, I love with my whole Heart and Soul; and whatever is deteſtable, I as vehemently abhor! And as I would joyfully die a Martyr to Virtue rather than ſhe ſhould ſuffer in the leaſt by any Lukewarmneſs of mine, ſo would I as freely periſh rather than do the leaſt Honour to Vice, or countenance a bad Cauſe on any Occaſion.

And further, I ſolemnly proteſt, that I am no way intereſted, nor in the leaſt biaſs'd by any View of recommending myſelf to, by any Expreſſions of Eſteem for, any one now living. Nor would I have ſaid ſo much of Mr. F. if I had foreſeen that my Letters would have come to the Preſs; and wiſh I could yet leave out ſome Things I have ſaid in the Originals, but muſt not, leſt I give Occaſion to my being reproach'd with publiſhing unfaithful Copies: And, beſides, I am well inform'd, that what I have ſaid of this great Man has been the moſt ſeverely fallen upon, and notoriouſly miſrepreſented.

None, who know and judge impartially of me, will, I am confident, imagine me capable of ſpeaking either well or ill of any Man from ſelfiſh, or any, but the moſt laudable and generous Views. As warmly as I have expreſs'd my Eſteem and Admiration of Mr. F. I am perſuaded,

ſuaded, that I ſhould, if put to the Trial, as zealouſly ſtand up for Socrates, *or for any other wiſe and good Man, who has been dead theſe two or three hundred Years; and could more tamely bear an Inſult or Injury to myſelf, than to the Memory of one whoſe Merit rather claims the eternal Gratitude and Reverence of Mankind. I have no perſonal Acquaintance with Mr.* F. *and therefore, except on Account of the peculiar Delight I take in attending the Worſhip of God when he officiates, his being now alive has nothing to do with any thing I have ſaid, or may again ſay, in his Praiſe; ſince I ſhould have been under the ſame Influence he had been dead an hundred Years ago, provided I could have attain'd as thorough a Knowledge of his Excellencies. And as I would not ſcruple to ſacrifice my Life, in Defence of his Perſon, now while he is with us, neither would I heſitate to make the ſame Sacrifice, in Defence of his Memory, againſt any apparent Attempts to injure it, and with it the Cauſe of Virtue and Goodneſs.*

G. B.

LETTERS

LETTERS

TO A

Clergyman in the Country.

LETTER I.

Rev. and Hon. Sir,

I Was ſomewhat ſurpriz'd at the Queſtion you put to me, in the laſt Letter you were ſo kind as to favour me with, and which you ſay was occaſioned by Mr. *D*——'s Intelligence concerning what you call my Apoſtacy. "What! ſay you, have you deſerted

" the Church you were baptiz'd into? Re-
" nounc'd your Religion at an Age, at a
" Time, when it might have been expected
" that you were quite fix'd and confirm'd in
" it? I am ſorry you are of ſuch a wavering,
" unſettled Turn; 'tis what I never could
" have look'd for from you!"

And I too am ſorry, dear Sir, that you had ſo mean an Opinion of me, as not to expect that I ſhould ever have been old enough to think for myſelf, or capable of chuſing for myſelf, in a Matter of ſuch conſiderable Moment.

You know, Sir, that while I was with you in *Lancaſhire*, *viz.* during the firſt nineteen Years of my Life, though I went to Church (as the Phraſe is) as frequently as moſt ſuch Youngſters do, I ſay you muſt be ſenſible that I could not, therefore, properly be ſaid to have then had any Religion at all: For can a blind Adherence and Conformity to a Set of Forms and Ceremonies, which I could ſee no other Reaſon to approve than my having been trained up to them from my Infancy, without any Knowledge of what other Syſtems, poſſibly better than ours, might be received or eſtabliſh'd in the Chriſtian World; Can this be call'd Religion? I apprehend not.

As

As for the firſt Principles, or the Grounds and Eſſence of their Religion, and the main Difference betwixt it and other Religions, or Sectaries, 'tis a Truth too notorious that few Members of the Church eſtabliſh'd in *England*, take much Pains to inſtruct their Children in them. And I proteſt that I do not know, throughout the whole Extent of my Acquaintance, either in Town or Country, one Perſon under twenty-five Years of Age, of the Church of *England*, that can give any tolerable Account of the fundamental Principles of that Church, or the moſt eſſential Difference between that and ſeveral other chriſtian Churches; or that can aſſign any more eligible Reaſons why they might not as well be of any other, than that "They were "brought up in it, and hope they ſhall ne-"ver change their Religion: That they have "no Reaſon to doubt of the Church of *Eng-*"*land*'s being the beſt in the World; elſe "why did our Fore-fathers, who were ſure-"ly as wiſe as we are, think ſo? For that "they did think ſo is very plain, or they "would not have eſtabliſh'd it by Law." Such a Church-man as this I was when I left *Lancaſhire*; and you aſk me, *if I have changed my Religion*: Though you never knew of any Religion that I had to change! If, Sir, I

 have

have any Religion now, 'tis the firſt I ever had, and my own free Choice; a Religion too, that is *eſtabliſh'd* — by the Authority of *Scripture* and *Common-Senſe*, at leaſt I ſincerely believe ſo; and I dare venture to promiſe that you ſhall never have any Reaſon to fear my *changing* it for any other, nor to charge me with being *unſettled* and *wavering*.

I appeal, Sir, to yourſelf, whether any one can be properly ſaid to have any Religion at all, who has not ſincerely, diligently, and impartially enquired and examined into that which he profeſſes, and is not ſincerely and fully convinc'd of its being the beſt? Nature and Common Senſe alone will aſſure us, that every Man is in Truth *indiſpenſibly* oblig'd to be of that Religion which appears to him to be the beſt, whatever the *Self-Indulgencies* of Men, which in this Caſe I fear *are but too general*, may lead them to urge to the contrary: And here what a dreadful Charge might be brought againſt Thouſands of a certain Body of Gentlemen? But I will ſhew my Reſpect for you, Sir, by ſaying no more on this Head. To return therefore to my Point.

I beg Leave further to aſk you, Whether you do not think that I ſhall be juſtifiable before

fore God and all good Men, in chuſing that Syſtem of Religion, which of all others, within the Reach of my Knowledge, appears moſt agreeable to Reaſon, Truth, and Nature, and to my Apprehenſions of the Deity, after a fair and diligent Scrutiny? For ſurely to me that is no Religion, which I do not judge to be right, agreeable to, and worthy, the Acceptance of God; and which I have not myſelf voluntarily choſen as ſuch! In a Word, he who does not exerciſe his Underſtanding, and act upon his own Choice, really is of no Religion at all. " * The Man who " only profeſſes to believe what another dic- " tates, or acts only as another requires, " without uſing his own Reaſon, or attend- " ing to the Dictates of his Conſcience, has " nothing like a divine Faith, but ſubſtitutes " a blind Obedience to Man, inſtead of a " Regard to God and Truth." Every Man who has a juſt Senſe of the Dignity of the human Character, as a free, a rational and moral Agent, muſt prefer the honeſt Dictates of his own Judgment, to the irrational Acquieſcence of implicit Faith in other Men's Opinions.

I flatter myſelf that you will, Sir, concur with me in theſe general Truths, and own that

* *Bourn's* Catechiſm.

that ſo far, at leaſt, I am not deluded or led aſtray by fanatick Conceit, or blind enthuſiaſtic Impulſe. As to the diſtinguiſhing Tenets and peculiar Doctrine of the Syſtem I have embrac'd, I cannot ſuppoſe you a Stranger to them, though doubtleſs they appear in different Lights to, and are differently underſtood by, us. The Queſtion is, whether you or I have the juſter Notions of them, or underſtand them beſt: But on this Head I ſhall not care to enter into a diſpute with you: Not that I look upon the Subject as a Matter of Indifference; but that I cannot think myſelf qualified to enter the Liſts with ſo powerful an Adverſary; who, beſides might diſdain to combat with ſo raw, ſo young, and unexperienc'd a Soldier, conſcious that little Honour can be got by a Victory over ſuch a weak Antagoniſt. I therefore rather chuſe humbly to lay before you a true and circumſtantial Narrative of the Steps I have taken, the Gradations by which I have moved towards what you call my *Apoſtacy*; to the End that by a free Inſpection into, a fair and impartial Examen of, my Motives for quitting the eſtabliſh'd Church, you may be convinc'd that I have acted only upon thoſe Principles of Honeſty and Candour which a Man whoſe Heart and Mind are open to Reaſon and Conviction, will never depart from

in any Sort of Enquiries, in any Part of his Conduct whatſoever. But as theſe Particulars are too many to be enumerated in this Epiſtle, already extended to an unuſual length, I muſt defer them till my next, which you may expect by Mr. *D* —— 's Brother *Harry*, who will be at *Liverpool* in leſs than three Weeks, and 'till then I remain,

Dear Sir,

Your dutiful and affectionate Kinſman,

G. B.

London, April 29. 1747.

LETTER II.

Rev. and Dear Sir,

AGREEABLE to my Promiſe I now ſit down to give you the Particulars of my Inducements for diſſenting from that Church which I had been taught to look upon as the Beſt and Pureſt in the World. But previous to this Account it will not be improper to take a View of the Principles I had imbibed in my Education. And this I the rather enter upon, in hopes of acquiring no ſmall Honour from the Conqueſt of ſo many violent hereditary Prejudices which you, Sir, who may recollect moſt of the Particulars, know very well that I was once enſlaved to, and will, I doubt not, in your own Conſcience, allow that I was highly in the Right to take Arms againſt and expel.

Well might you ſay, that *you could never have expected* what you call *a Change of Religion in me.* You who are ſo thoroughly acquainted with the ſtrong Prepoſſeſſions in Favour of the Eſtabliſhed Church, which I had

had contracted in a narrow Education, in a more zealous than truly religious Family; you indeed could have little Cauſe to ſuſpect that I could ever quit that *Church** for a *Diſſenter's Meeting-Houſe!* In our Family Contempt ever accompanied the very ſound of the Words *Meeting-Houſe.* All my Father's Children were taught from their earlieſt Infancy to deſpiſe and abhor *Preſbyterians:* Under which Denomination were wiſely comprehended Diſſenters of every Sort but Quakers. *Preſbyterian!* The very Name was ſynonimous to Cut-throat, Incendiary, Blaſphemer, Traitor, Hypocrite, Enthuſiaſt, Fanatic; in fine every thing wicked, deſpicable, ridiculous. We were even taught to look upon it as a criminal Meanneſs to have any Society with the Children of Diſſenters, or to ſpeak to them at all, unleſs it were to jeer and reproach them with the Religion which their Parents were bringing them up to, as if it were a Family Stain, and the Source of Diſhonour and Infamy. Whenever we paſs'd by the Diſſenter's Place of Publick Worſhip, which ſtood very near to the

* Here the Author ſpeaks as a true *Church of England-man*, confining the Meaning of the Word *Church*, to Walls and Pews, Bells and a Steeple, Wood and Stone, *&c.* as the common People in general, of the Church of *England*, underſtand it. But the meaneſt Diſſenter has a very different Idea of the Word *Church*.

Church, we could not regard the very Materials of which the Building was compoſed, with a charitable Eye. But on a *Sunday*, when we have ſeen the Diſſenters paſſing and re-paſſing the Church-yard, through which lay the principal Way to the Meeting-Houſe, how have our young Hearts been fired with Reſentment of their being ſuffered to paſs through our conſecrated Ground to their unhallow'd Rendezvous? Nay, and what ſtill aggravated the Enormity, that they ſhould dare to brave us in our very Churches, by having their Meetings at the ſame Time that we went to our lawful eſtabliſhed Church, ſo that we could not avoid either their mingling with us in the Church-yard, or our ſeeing them, through the Church Doors, and Windows, if they happen'd to be going in after us, or going out before us; a Proſpect which could not but greatly interrupt the Devotions of, and give the higheſt Diſguſt to, a *true Church-man.*

And on what, it may be aſk'd, where all theſe Antipathies founded? Why on the Ideas that had been given us of the moral Character and Religion of a Diſſenter. Not that we were any otherwiſe acquainted with either, than from the Stories we daily heard of them, and which we were oblig'd to believe, or call

call in Queſtion the Veracity and Judgments of our Parents, Grand-mothers, &c. From theſe Fountains it is that, in general, we draw our Prejudices and Prepoſſeſſions; and which, by being very early implanted, are hardly ever thoroughly eradicated, but grow up with the Mind, gathering Strength 'till ſo firmly rooted, obſtinate, and inflexible, that Reaſon ſeldom, nor always Demonſtration itſelf, are able to make them bend to Truth. Thus far I can ſpeak for myſelf, that I ever, 'till within theſe five Years, underſtood by the Word Preſbyterian, or Diſſenter, a Perſon of a ſingular, obſtinate, envious, factious, hypocritical Temper or turn of Mind; one who thinks the Church's doing or *Enjoining* any thing, a ſufficient Reaſon for his *not* complying with it: Or *vice verſa*, her Diſapprobation of any thing, a very good Cauſe for his taking it up as an indiſpenſible Duty. One whoſe Averſion to the eſtabliſh'd Church of the Nation, has its Source in the malicious Envy with which he beholds her Purity and flouriſhing Condition: Whoſe depraved and narrow Notions of God and Chriſtianity, incapacitate him from entering into the Beauty, and Rectitude of her Doctrines, having his Heart invincibly prejudiced againſt an impartial Attention to them, or a free Enquiry into their ſuperiour Excellence: In ſhort, one

who would infallibly over-turn both our Civil and Eccleſiaſtical Conſtitutions, pull down our Churches, and cut the Throats of both Miniſter and Congregation.

This Detail of Infant Prejudices you will, Sir, perhaps, call *Childiſh Particulars*; and I doubt not but they will put your Patience to the Stretch; but I have thought it the more neceſſary to enter into a minute Conſideration of them, as they are the Support of all our religious Differences and Animoſities; and therefore deſerve your ſerious Attention, and utmoſt Endeavours to root out of the Minds of the People, as far as your Power extends; which indeed is alſo the Duty of every Man, but the Clergy more eſpecially, as our ſpiritual Guides.

How unnatural, how deplorable is the Management of thouſands of Parents, and others, who take upon them the Education of Youth; but who, inſtead of being the Means of enlightening their growing Underſtandings, and leading them into the Paths of Truth and Wiſdom, turn aſide their Infant Steps (which Nature herſelf, if left only to her Care, might perhaps have directed right) into the Mazes of Error and Folly, from which the unhappy Wanderer may perhaps

haps never be able to extricate himſelf. Few have the good Fortune which I have met with, and for which I have Reaſon to bleſs God all the Days of my Life: For, really, 'tis a moſt exalted Pleaſure to grow wiſer and better; and I doubt not but that it will yield me great Satisfaction to the laſt Hour of my Life, to reflect on the Ignorance and Bigotry I have ſo happily got rid of, and which, as you obſerve, Sir, could never have been expected from one who for twenty Years together, *viz.* the firſt Twenty of my Life, never but once ſet Foot within any other Place of publick Worſhip, than the Pariſh Church eſtabliſh'd by Law, and was taught to look on all others with Abhorrence, and Contempt. As for that one Time that I did happen into a Diſſenter's Meeting-Houſe, 'twas merely by Accident, yet the Circumſtances attending it will never be forgot by me, and may not be unworthy your Notice. The Story itſelf is, indeed, made up only of trifling and childiſh Incidents; but will nevertheleſs afford a lively View of the Depravity of the rational human Mind, by the Force of Prejudice, inſtanc'd in a Scene drawn from real Life, and in no vulgar Station: And which I am the more tempted to give you, for the Sake of ſome of my young Couſins in the Country, who ſometimes may feel

feel the Influence of your Admonitions: For I am pretty ſure that the Affair needs only to be impartially and ſimply related, to force even you to apply the Ridicule naturally ariſing from it, to the Parties on whom it muſt naturally turn.

'Twas on a *Sunday* Afternoon, that two other good Boys and myſelf, all of us about the ſame Age, *viz.* Sixteen, had agreed to ſtay from Church, and take a Ramble in the Fields, as we had frequently done; but, in the Out-ſkirts of the Town * being to paſs by the Diſſenters Meeting-Houſe, in which the Worſhip was juſt then begun, and ſeeing the Doors open, we agreed to go in, to ſee what Novelties the Place would afford. We were immediately lock'd in a Pew, and ſo oblig'd to ſtay the whole Service, which was much more than we intended. The Congregation was but ſmall, the genteeleſt People there of no very high Claſs, and the Miniſter very well ſuited to his Flock: An honeſt-looking plain old Man, reputed to have a good deal of Learning, but no great Elocution. However he ſurpriz'd us much, by uttering a long Prayer *Extempore*, which we thought

* This was at *M*——, in *Cheſhire*, and not in the ſame Town in which the Letter-writer informs us, the Meeting-Houſe ſtood contiguous to the Church.

thought a very difficult Taſk; but concluded that he muſt have got it by rote out of ſome Book. But what aſtoniſh'd me moſt, was to hear him pray for the Proteſtant Churches of all Denominations: This was an Inſtance of Charity which I did not expect from a Diſſenter. His Sermon, ſuited to the Underſtandings of his People, I underſtood every Word of that I attended to; and could not but admire at his quoting, and making very honourable Mention of, the great *Tillotſon*, who I knew was a Church of *England* Biſhop. All this I thought was not very conſiſtent with that Rancour and Hatred which I had been told the Diſſenters bore to the Church. However I concluded that, to be ſure, they would not fail to put on ſpecious Appearances to ſecure their being tolerated.

When ſet at Liberty, we began to animadvert on what we had ſeen and heard; and all agreed that there was nothing of Harm either in the Singing, Praying, or Preaching: Only none of theſe were according to *the Appointment of the* CHURCH: And that this Diſobedience of theirs was, indeed, very inſolent and highly provoking. "What! ſaid "one, is the Matter, pray, that the ſame "Singing-Pſalms that ſerve us at Church, "won't do for their Meeting-Houſes?"

Right,

Right, ſays another, *and why mayn't the Prayers which the Church has provided do for them? Why muſt they be at Liberty to make others, according to their own Whims, as if it were out of Contradiction; as if the Church, and all the learned Biſhops, and the Parliament, did not know what's proper for every body to ſay in their Prayers! Beſides, our* SAVIOUR *ſpeaks againſt long Prayers.* "True, "ſays another, but how would they employ "the Time, if they were only to ſay the "Lord's Prayer, or ſome thing as ſhort?" *Why*, it was reply'd, *our Prayers in the Common Prayer-Book are but ſhort.* "That's "true," rejoin'd the other, "but then if we "put all the Prayers into one, and all the "Time together, that is ſpent in Praying at "Church, either in the Morning or After-"noon Service, we ſhall find that there are "as many Words, and as much Time ſpent, "in Prayer, at Churches as at Meetings. "All the Difference is, that the *Preſbyteri-*"*ans* put together all that they have to ſay "into one Prayer, and ſay *Amen* once for "all; whereas we divide it into ſeveral Parts, "ſaying *Amen* to each, which makes the "Time ſeem not ſo tedious." *To be ſure*, reply'd another, *our Way is much the beſt, for it does not ſeem half ſo tedious when one is employ'd in turning over one's Common Prayer-Book,*

Book, backwards and forwards, as the Parſon ſhifts his Place, and every now and then ſaying, Amen, *which keeps one awake.*

In theſe Words, or Words to the ſame Effect, we expreſs'd our Sentiments of the Diſſenter's Manner of Worſhip, 'till we got home, where I, who had been miſſed from Church, was immediately examined, and forced to confeſs where I had been. Had I broke open a Houſe, or committed ſome capital Crime, I could not have been more ſeverely upbraided with it, than I was for this grievous Offence by my Mother, my Father being then out of Town. "What! ſays ſhe, you want to "turn *Preſbyterian*, do you? I proteſt I had "rather you had ſpent the time at *Joe* Harriſon*'s! your Father ſcorn'd ever to ſet his "Foot in a Meeting-Houſe. He ſhall know, "as ſure as you're alive, how you ſpend your "*Sunday* Afternoons; and we ſhall ſee what "he'll ſay to you." I did not much wonder at this Storm, expecting that her violent Zeal for the Church would be alarm'd by her Apprehenſions that this was not the firſt Time of my having viſited the Diſſenter's Meeting, when I have been miſſed from Church. But

* A noted Gambling and Bawdy-Houſe, where the greateſt Extravagancies and Immoralities were practiced even on *Sundays*.

knowing my Innocence, and conſcious of no Inclination towards a ſecond Viſit to the Meeting, I anſwer'd her very calmly, and with more Reſolution than I ever preſumed to do on any Occaſion before. " Why, Madam," ſaid I, " ſhould you be ſo angry at my indulging an " innocent Curioſity, which I have now quite " ſatisfied, and have no deſire to go again? " But ſuppoſe I ſhould, where would be the " Harm of it? If they and their Religion are " ſo monſtrous, ſurely the more I ſee of them " the worſe I ſhall like them. I hope you have " not ſo mean an Opinion of me as to think I " can poſſibly be brought to prefer the *Preſ-* " *byterians* to our own Religion. Indeed, Ma- " dam, it looks as if you had not a very good " Opinion of the Church yourſelf, or you " would not be afraid of my making a Com- " pariſon between it and Meetings, from which " I may ſee my ſelf of both."

This Reply only ſerv'd to enrage her the more; and the next day my Father returning home, ſhe was as good as her Word, and informed him that, Truly his Son, inſtead of going to Church on *Sunday* Afternoon, had been at the Preſbyterian Meeting-Houſe. This put my poor Father alſo into an immoderate Paſſion, which however was ſoon ſpent, and ended in threatning me with

heart

hearty Drubbing if ever I went there again. Being grown pretty cool, the zealous good Man told me how, when a Boy, he had ſerved my Uncle *B*——, his eldeſt Brother, for a like Offence. "Your Uncle, ſaid he, from his Infancy was ſober and grave as an old Man, and was, to be ſure, a clever Lad; but he would have his own Way, and tho' he knew the great Averſion all the Family had for Preſbyterians, we at laſt diſcover'd that he had been once or twice at their Meeting-Houſe. Hereupon I took him aſide, and expoſtulating with him upon it, inſiſted on his promiſing me never to go again. But he refuſing to gratify me, I reſented it, and from High Words we fell to heavy blows; and tho' he was fifteen Years old and I but thirteen, the Victory fell to my Lot, and after threſhing him heartily, I made him promiſe never more to ſet his Foot in a Meeting-Houſe, unleſs to aſſiſt in pulling one down. And ſo, in ſhort, as my Cudgel wrought an effectual Cure upon him, ſo I doubt not but the ſame Medicine may do you good, Sirrah: But as you ſeem ſorry for what you've done, I ſhall take no further Notice of your firſt Offence, but, you Raſcal, beware the Second."

Having ended his Story, the good Man proceeded to enlarge, with great Vehemence,

upon the uſual Topics urg'd againſt the Diſſenters; and dwelt particularly on the Beheading of King *Charles*, charging the whole Body of Diſſenters as his Murderers. This neither he nor I then knew to be a falſe and injurious Charge; tho' we only believed it upon the Authority of vulgar Tradition; but I am now convinc'd of the contrary, and ſurpriz'd that any Body in this enlightned and literary Age and Nation ſhould be ſo ignorant of the Modern Hiſtory of their own Country, of a Fact which is now ſet in as clear a Light, and as much out of Diſpute, among intelligent and impartial Perſons, as any hiſtorical Fact whatever.

My Father's Diſcourſe, which was greatly enforced by the high Opinion I and all the World juſtly had of his Honeſty and Sincerity, made no ſmall Impreſſion on me, and ſtrengthned all the Prejudices I had before conceived againſt the Diſſenters. I could not but look on them as a Set of very bad People indeed, who could make my Father, a Man of the moſt extenſive Good-nature, ſo inveterately their Enemy. They are, thought I, to be ſure, a ſet of monſtrous Hypocrites, who may eaſily impoſe on young and unexperienced Boys like my ſelf; but my Father, who perfectly knows the World, ſees into them

and

and diſcerns their true Characters. In ſhort, from that time I look'd with a more uncharitable Eye than ever on the poor Diſſenters, and never after was in any of their Meeting-Houſes in the Country.

In This unfavourable Diſpoſition towards a Set of People, whoſe real Characters and Principles I was not in the leaſt acquainted with, I continued 'till the Twentieth Year of my Age, when I came to reſide in *London*, where I had not been many Months before I happened to hear the celebrated Mr. *Foſter* Preach.

It was not Curioſity, or a roving Inclination for Novelty, that led me to hear this Gentleman, but a meer Accident. Going up *Cornhill* one *Sunday* Evening, I met my worthy and amiable Friend Mr. *F*—— *D*——, who aſk'd me to bear him Company to Mr. *Foſter*'s Lecture, ſaying that "if I never had "been there, 'twas time I ſhould, he be-"ing one of the moſt extraordinary Men "among the Diſſenters." As I knew that Mr. *D*—— was a ſincere Church-man, of a Family as remarkable as my own for Zeal for the eſtabliſh'd Religion; and that he was beſides a Man of Senſe and Learning, I thought I might ſafely venture my ſelf any where

where in his Company, and therefore went with him.

This Lecture is held on *Sunday* Evenings, in the Winter, at Mr. *Chandler*'s Meeting-Houſe in the *Old Jewry*; and is ſupported by the voluntary Subſcription of a Set of Gentlemen, who perhaps do not amount to a fiftieth Part of the uſual Number of Attendants at it. As we went in ſome little Time before the Preacher came, I had Leiſure to look about me, and was much ſurpriz'd at the Sight of ſuch a numerous Congregation; but more ſo when told by my Friend, that probably two Thirds of them were either of the Church of *England*, or Diſſenters brought up in Principles very different from ſome of Mr. *Foſter*'s, but all now equally become his Admirers, and Converts to his Doctrines. This ſeem'd very ſtrange to me, being perſuaded that his Notions muſt be manifeſtly abſurd, as a Diſſenter. But my Reflections on this Head were ſoon interrupted by the coming in of this admir'd Orator, with whoſe Aſpect and Mien I was very much taken. Mr. *Foſter* is not a handſome Man, and his Size is diminutive: But then there is ſuch an honeſt Openneſs in his Countenance, ſuch a ſenſible Sapience in his Looks, ſuch Benevolence and Generoſity ſparkle in his Eyes, as greatly

greatly prepoſſeſſes the Beholder in his Favour. But when he began to addreſs himſelf to the Deity, ſtrong as my Prejudices againſt him were, as a Diſſenter, they began to vaniſh inſenſibly, and I perceived my Heart warm towards him, as if he had been my Father, or ſome valu'd Friend from whom I had been long abſent, and had but juſt then met with. Never had I before heard any thing like what he deliver'd: And that *Extempore* too, yet with the greateſt Eaſe and Fluency. His Expreſſions were indeed ſuch, and in ſuch a Manner utter'd, as became a Man addreſſing himſelf to his God; as one conſcious of his being, as it were, the Mouth of ſo many Hundreds of rational Creatures there met together to offer up their Adoration, Prayers and Praiſes, to the Father of Wiſdom and Virtue. I had never before heard my own Sentiments ſo nobly, ſo admirably expreſs'd! His Prayer was every Word exactly conformable to my own Notions of that ſacred Duty, in which I had ever been nice enough to be diſſatisfy'd with ſeveral of the cold and formal Preſcriptions of the Church. All my Soul, as it were, mingled with every Syllable he utter'd, and anſwer'd *Amen* to every Sentence: This was the firſt Time I had ever fervently join'd in publick Prayer with any Miniſter; either their Manner

ner being too inſipid to move, or the Words they are oblig'd continually to repeat have quite loſt their Meaning, and become mere articulate Sounds, conveying no Ideas, or ſuch as only ſkim the Surface of the Attention, without ever ſinking deep into the Mind, or engaging the Concurrence of the Heart. But if I found his Language admirably adapted to the Dignity of his Office, I thought his Looks, his Geſture, his every Attitude and Motion were no leſs ſo. Not that in the whole of his Action he can juſtly be rank'd among the moſt accompliſh'd and ſtudied Orators: No, far from it; for ſome of his Peculiarities, perhaps, deſerve Cenſure rather than Applauſe. But of this more hereafter.

When he had ended his Prayer, he gave us an excellent Sermon indeed. The Subject was Univerſal *Benevolence*, *Charity*, *Mercy*, and *good Will* towards *all Men*; which, as I have ſince underſtood, are ſome of his favourite Topics. Theſe excellent and truly Chriſtian Virtues he diſplay'd with ſuch a beautiful Energy, as not only did Juſtice to the Chriſtian Religion, but Honour to the Nature of Man: And at the ſame Time gave the moſt convincing Proofs of the great Goodneſs of his own Heart.

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Returning from the *Old Jewry* we were join'd by a young Gentleman, a Friend of Mr. *D*—'s, and a Diſſenter. We all three agreed to ſpend the Remainder of the Evening together at Mr. *D* —— 's Houſe. My Friend was not at all ſurpriz'd to find me quite captivated with Mr. *Foſter*. As to Mr. *D*—— himſelf, you know, Sir, that he is of a Complexion very different from mine. He is a Man of a cool Turn of Mind, ſlow, tho' ſoft, Paſſions, and little affected by any thing: Even Demonſtrations themſelves have but half their Force with him; for though they convince his Judgment, and gain his Aſſent, he is ſtill the ſame Man; ſtill as loath to part with an old Syſtem as with an old Friend. His Zeal for the Church, as the Phraſe is, will ever triumph over every thing that he thinks has a Tendency to weaken it's Grandeur and Authority. Beſides, the Multiplicity of his Buſineſs prevents him from applying himſelf much to Religious Enquiries; and then he ſo ſeldom goes where he can hear them freely diſcuſs'd, that whenever his Curioſity or Reſolution are awak'd, they are again too ſoon and too eaſily lull'd aſleep. And it is alſo to be conſider'd, what Influence a whole Family of Church of *England* Clergy muſt have over him, almoſt every Relation he has being of that Order, for which him-

ſelf was alſo deſign'd and educated. In ſhort, 'tis no great Wonder that he is not an entire Proſelyte to the Man and the Principles he cannot but admire and approve.

As for me, who am under no Influence, no Obligation to diſguiſe my Sentiments; who could never be indifferent to any thing of Importance; who have naturally an eager Thirſt after Improvement in every thing eſſential to the great Ends of our Creation; I could not harbour the leaſt Thought of continuing halting between two Opinions. I ſaid to myſelf " Either Mr. *Foſter* is right " in diſſenting from the Church, or he is " wrong. —— His Judgment is certainly " good: Therefore it cannot be Time " thrown away to examine his Principles. " As *Elijah* ſays, *If the* LORD *be* GOD, " *follow him, but if* BAAL, *then follow* " *him.*"

I enquired of Mr. *D*—— concerning Mr. *Foſter*'s Principles, as to the Fundamentals of the Chriſtian Religion? To which my Friend reply'd, " Indeed I cannot ſatisfy you on " ſome Points on which I have never heard " him explain himſelf, but the World re- " putes him to be an *Arian*: But for my " Part, I never enter into the Diſputes upon

" ſuch

" ſuch Heads." —— " Nor I neither," ſaid the young Gentleman who came with us from the Lecture, " but I freely own, that " if I were to pin my Faith on any Man's " Sleeve, Mr. *Foſter* would be that Man. " For, as I am very ſure that he is biaſs'd by " no wordly Views, ſo I can hardly conceive " that a Perſon of his great Senſe, Learning, " and Goodneſs of Heart, can be much " miſtaken, or propagate any Principles of a " bad Tendency. The Rectitude of his " Life and Manners is ſo well known, that " Envy itſelf cannot charge him with the " leaſt Immorality. Nay, his whole Beha- " viour is not only blameleſs, but merits " our higheſt Applauſe; and if all be true " that I have heard of him, which I don't " in the leaſt doubt, I ſhall never expect to " find a better Man. One of his Character " cannot be ſuppoſed to teach falſe Doc- " trines, knowing them to be ſo; and, on " the other Hand, I can hardly ſuppoſe him " capable of being deceived himſelf, having " certainly as clear and deep a Penetration " as any Divine in the three Kingdoms: " But what is more than this, every Body " eſteems the *Man* as much as they admire " the *Preacher*. People of all Parties, Sects, " and Denominations, crowd to hear him; " all Lovers of impartial Reaſoning and free

" Inquiry; all who delight in hearing real
" Chriſtianity, true Religion and Virtue vin-
" dicated, aſſerted and diſplayed in all the
" rich Variety of their own beauteous Co-
" lours; and Irreligion and Vice juſtly ex-
" pos'd: The rational Incitements to the
" former urg'd and enforc'd, and all Propen-
" ſities to the latter exhibited to publick
" View, in their own odious, ridiculous, and
" contemptible, though often diſguiſed,
" Forms. And 'tis to be hoped that theſe
" his pious Endeavours are not without Suc-
" ceſs, his Audience being always very nu-
" merous, and it really gives me Pleaſure
" to ſee ſo large an Aſſembly ſo uncom-
" monly, ſo eagerly attentive."

In theſe Words, or Words to the ſame Effect, as near as I can recollect, did the young Gentleman expreſs himſelf, which not a little confirmed me in the good Opinion I had conceived of Mr. *Foſter*. I went from Mr. *D*——'s full of what I had ſeen and heard, and reſolved to attend at the ſame Lecture the next *Sunday* Evening. I did ſo, and was ſtill more and more charm'd with the Preacher. And now I began to reflect very ſeriouſly on the Accounts that had been given me of the Religion and Morals of the Diſſenters, and aſk'd myſelf, if it was probable that they were

were born with Paſſions and Propenſities different from thoſe of other Men, of other Perſuaſions? To ſuppoſe this appeared to me very monſtrous and abſurd. "Is it then poſſible," ſaid I, "that their Religion, or indeed any other Syſtem, ſhould have ſo unnatural an Effect on it's Followers as to make them wicked Men and bad Members of Society. Or if there are any ſuch religious Monſters, are the Preſbyterians ſuch? Or if they are, if the Diſſenters in general are of the Character that has been given me of them, yet is it poſſible that a Man who ſeems ſo zealous in the Cauſe of God, of Chriſtianity, of Virtue, of every thing truly great and good, ſhould be in Reality of the ſame Character? Nay, or tainted with any bad Principle or evil Habit."

As to my firſt Quere, I ſaw no Reaſon to to think that any religious Syſtem, among all the Variety of Chriſtian Sectaries, had the leaſt Tendency to make its Profeſſors more wicked than they would have been if not of that Religion; except, indeed, the Syſtem of the Church of *Rome*, which, according to all Accounts, obliges every zealous Member thereof to renounce even Humanity itſelf. But, thought I, can this be ſaid of any other Religion?

gion? The Diſſenters, as ſuch, for aught I have ever *ſeen* of them, are at leaſt as good Members of Society as thoſe of the Eſtabliſhed Church: Though 'tis Pity that both are no better. But even if they and their Principles really were, in general, as bad as they have been repreſented to me, yet 'tis impoſſible that no wiſe and good men ſhould be found among them, as doubtleſs there are Thouſands of every Nation and Religion in the World. Now if there are both wiſe and good Diſſenters, I have all the Reaſon in the World to think that Mr. *Foſter* is one of the wiſeſt and beſt; nay, wiſer and better than the common Race of Mankind, of all Religions.

But why, ſaid I to my ſelf, for this is the main Quere at laſt, does ſo intelligent a Perſon, one of ſuch upright Intentions, of ſuch a ſocial Temper, and univerſal Charity; why does he chuſe to diſſent from, rather than join himſelf to, the eſtabliſh'd Church? There is no doubt of his being perfectly well acquainted with thoſe Doctrines, and that Practice from which he diſſents; nor that the Church would have highly careſs'd a Proſelyte of ſuch Diſtinction. What Dignities might he not have attain'd, what Preferments would have been thought too great

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for him? None, I am well aſſured. He might not only make his Fortune, but ſtill ſerve his God as much, ſtill do as much Good in private Life, and by his own Example; nay, more, as his Opportunities would be greater in the Church, than among Diſſenters, whoſe Miniſters are but *tolerated*, not provided for by the Laws of their Country.

I can eaſily account for a Church-Clergyman's not going over to the Diſſenters, even tho' he diſſent never ſo much from the Church in his own private Judgment: For there are no Dignities, no Proſpects of Preferment, no rich Benefices among the Diſſenters, no Laws to ſecure Payment of the Preacher's Income. —— But to what ſhall we attribute the Conſtancy of the Man who regards not tempting Allurements to Conformity on the one Hand, nor on the other, all the Diſcouragements and Inconveniences inſeparable from the Condition of a Diſſenting Miniſter? To what but the Inflexibility of a conſcientious Reſolution to adhere to what he apprehends to be TRUTH. Among the more Ignorant, indeed, of all Parties, this Conſtancy may be meer Obſtinacy, the Effects of Prejudice, and Narrowneſs of Mind; but this is not the Caſe with the Man of Integrity, Capacity,

Capacity, and Extent of Knowledge, acquired by free and impartial Enquiry. Such as Mr. *Foſter*, who is not in the leaſt tainted with Prejudice, Bigotry, or Narrowneſs of Mind; whoſe noble, elevated, ſublime Thoughts, ſoar infinitely above all the little contracted Syſtems eſtabliſh'd by Human Authorities, Councils and Creeds, and all the Singularities of Sectary-founders, and Broachers of new Diviſions among Chriſtians.

In this Manner I frequently reflected and reaſon'd with my ſelf 'till, in fine, I concluded that the Church, of which I had been uſed to entertain ſuch high Notions, tho' I did not very well know why, or wherefore, muſt certainly, in ſome very material Reſpects, fall greatly ſhort of that Purity and Excellence it pretends to, or Mr. *Foſter* would not refuſe to conform to it.

But, to be ſatisfied more fully on a Subject ſo new to me, I reſolved to read the beſt polemical Tracts on both Sides; and, that I might be ſtill the more able to form a tolerable Judgment, to frequent the moſt noted Diſſenter's Meeting-Houſes in *London*, as regularly as I had frequented the Churches before: Accordingly, I attended, by turns, at Dr. *Benſon*'s, Mr. *Chandler*'s, Dr. *Allen*'s, Mr.

Mr. *Pope*'s, Dr. *Wright*'s, Mr. *Foſter*'s, and ſome others, 'till I had got a thorough Inſight into their Principles, as well as their Forms and Manner of Worſhip. At Intervals I alſo went to the eſtabliſh'd Church, as uſual, and particularly to St. *Mary le Bow*, where I heard the learned Dr. *Newton*'s Panegyrical Sermon on the Common Prayer-Book; but thought his Eulogium a very trifling Performance. I believe, indeed, that the Doctor handled his Subject as well as any Divine in *England* could have done, and his Arguments were, indeed, worthy of a Church founded upon, and ſupported by, human Authorities, but not worthy of Dr. *Newton*. In fine, the more I ſaw, heard, and read of the Church, the more I grew diſſatisfy'd with it, 'till at laſt I found that if there had been no other Church in *Chriſtendom*, I muſt, nevertheleſs, have diſſented from this, even though there had not been another Diſſenter in the World: This I muſt have thought myſelf indiſpenſibly obliged to, rather than renouce my Underſtanding, my Reaſon, my Integrity; rather than trifle with my God, upon the moſt ſolemn and awful Occaſions: that God who is the Searcher of all Hearts, and from whom no Secrets are hid.

But, on the other Hand, the more I became acquainted with the Diſſenters, the better I liked them. Not that I imagin'd I had found Perfection in their Church, but then it ſeemed to me to approach much nearer to Apoſtolical Chriſtianity, than the Church eſtabliſh'd by Law did, and which therefore now loſt all its Dignity with me: What I once thought a reaſonable Authority, now appeared to me no better than inſolent Preſumption, and Uſurpation. But of this more hereafter; for 'tis now high Time to conclude an Epiſtle which is already extended to an immoderate Length, and which I therefore beg Leave to conclude with a Requeſt, that you will ſoon write to,

Dear Sir,

Your moſt dutiful

and affectionate Kinſman,

G. B.

London, May 20. 1747.

LETTER

LETTER III.

London, June 12, 1747.

Rev. and Hon. Sir,

I AM much oblig'd to you for yours, dated the 3d of this Month, and am very well pleaſed with your Reſolution, not to anſwer any thing I have advanced on the Subject of Religion, 'till I have finiſhed all I intend to offer on that Subject. This is the more agreeable to me, Sir, as your taking the Whole of my Principles together, and comparing the Parts with each other, may the better enable you to ſee their Conſiſtency, and form an impartial Judgment of their real Merits, with reſpect to their Agreement with Truth, Reaſon, and the Goſpel Scheme of Religion and Mortality: Therefore, without further Preface, I ſhall begin where I left off in my laſt.

I was particularly pleaſed with the Diſſenters for the unlimited Freedom prevailing among them in Matters of Religion, and the

Liberty that a Man of a more exalted Genius hath of exerting himſelf to the Edification of his Auditors: I ſpeak chiefly with Regard to the ſacred Duty of Prayer, on which to lay any Reſtraint is, I think, the greateſt Abſurdity. In this Reſpect Mr. *Foſter*, in my Opinion, excels all his Brethren, tho' many of them certainly are much to be admired for that Propriety of Expreſſion, that pious Eloquence, which warms and elevates the Heart to true Devotion.

'Tis true, as I have before obſerv'd to you, this Gentleman may not, by ſome Criticks, be allowed to be either a perfect Orator, a Maſter of ſo great a Propriety of Geſture in Prayer, as he might have been, had he made theſe exteriour Graces more his Study than 'tis thought he has done. Let this be granted; but then it muſt alſo be allowed, that he makes a moſt ſubſtantial Attonement for the Want of ſuch uneſſential Accompliſhments, by the ardent Sincerity in which it evidently appears he is entirely wrapped up, quite regardleſs of ſuch Externals, and unconſcious of either the Beauties or Blemiſhes of his Action, which I look upon as the involuntary Effects of the lively Agitations of his Mind. However, (to a good-natur'd Man) theſe very Incorrectneſſes, for which Mr.

Foſter

Foſter is moſt blam'd, will appear as Beauties, when it is conſider'd how much the Mind of this great and worthy Man is taken up with Matters of far higher Importance. Anxious for the preſent and future Happineſs of his Fellow-Creatures, and full of the deepeſt Concern for their Vices and Follies, one while he moſt pathetically deprecates the Divine Judgments, and with humble Fervency interceeds for weak and ſinful *Man:* Then recollecting the paſt Favours and Mercies beſtow'd on his unworthy Creatures by an Almighty and beneficient *Creator*, with what Warmth of Gratitude, what lively Thankfulneſs, what ardent Sincerity does he praiſe and glorify the Author of every Bleſſing we enjoy. Immers'd in this ſacred Duty, and totally abſtracted from outward Objects, he is no longer ſenſible that the Eyes of Men are fix'd upon his every Motion, every Attitude, every Look. No! he knows not the little Arts that Men of leſs Sincerity make uſe of (though moſt frequently in their Diſcouſes from the Pulpit) to gain Applauſe, and catch the Critick's Approbation. His nobler and more generous Soul, conſcious of ſuperiour Worth, unpremeditately animates and directs this dumb Rhethorick, theſe correſpondent Expreſſions of the livelier Emotions of his Heart: Diſdaining to attend to thoſe little Proprieties,

Proprieties, which are incompatible with the Ardour of the noble, honeſt, and virtuous Paſſions, which glow in the Breaſt of a true *Chriſtian* Hero; a Hero exerting all his Faculties for the Honour of his God, and the Happineſs of his Fellow Creatures.

But what adds an infinite Grace to his Action, and greatly contributes to inſpire the Hearts of the Congregation with the warmeſt Senſe of Devotion, is the Vivacity and ſtrong Expreſſion of his Countenance. His Eyes are not confin'd, and, as it were, tied down to a Book fill'd with Preſcriptions, which cannot but fetter and clog both the Geſture and Thoughts of the Miniſter. Quite at Liberty to pour out his whole Soul before his Maker, and having his Attention quite free of all external Interruption, his Eyes and every Feature are not leſs than his Heart and Voice taken up in the Divine Employment. But here Deſcription fails; nor can I find adequate Terms to expreſs the Manner in which, by his Looks, his Action, the Ardour of his Voice and Language, he works up the Hearts and Minds of his Auditors to what I call a *rational* Enthuſiaſm. But this more particularly in his Sermons; in which, by *Reaſon* itſelf, by Reaſon only, he animates and commands our Paſſions, while he gains

our

our Aſſent by convincing our Underſtanding. By Demonſtrations alone, which from too many other Pulpits appear dry, tedious, and cold, he fires our Soul with a laudable Reſentment of Folly, Cruelty, Narrowneſs of Mind, and Superſtition; warms and elevates us to the Love of God for the Sake of his ſupreme Excellencies, and tranſcendant Goodneſs; inſpires us with a becoming Zeal for the Honour of our Nature, ennobled by the native Semblance we bear to the glorious God himſelf. The Soul of *Man*, of a *rational* Man, is the Image of God, the Deity in Miniature! ——— Forgive me, dear Sir, I cannot recollect the ſublime Truths I have ſo often heard ſo admirably enforc'd by this truly great Man, without taking Fire from the Reflection, and breaking out into ſome Irregularities, which you will call Incongruities, and for which I can plead no other Excuſe, than that they are produc'd by the irreſiſtible Impulſes and Emotions of a Heart, which will not always wait for the cool Direction of Judgment.

If I was diſſatisfy'd with the Preſcriptions of the *Church*, I was no leſs ſo with the Polemick Writings of *her Divines*. On the other Hand, the diſſenting Miniſters, who formerly appear'd to me in a very mean Light,

Light, now become the Objects of my Eſteem and Veneration: But this is not to be underſtood of all who paſs under the Denomination of diſſenting Miniſters, for ſome of them are contemptible enough, tho' we ſeldom find any ſuch Immoraliſts, ſuch Profligates among them, as too frequently creep into the eſtabliſh'd Church-Benefices. No, Sir, thoſe that I admire are ſuch as *Chandler*, *Benſon*, *Foſter*, *Lardner*: than whom I do not believe that, among the whole Body of the Church-Clergy, numerous as they are, four greater Men are to be found: I ſpeak of them in their double Capacities, both as Preachers and Writers. Indeed it muſt be confeſs'd, that the Reverend Gentlemen of the eſtabliſhed Church lie under a great Diſadvantage, from their Apprehenſions of offending againſt that Authority they ſubſcribe to, which will not allow them always to avow their Sentiments, and, conſequently, not to give the World ſuch Proofs of their Abilities, as the diſſenting Clergy freely do.

As to the Conduct, in private Life, of the diſſenting Clergy in general, I am unwilling to draw any Compariſons between them and their Brethren of the Eſtabliſhment; for bad Men are to be found every where, among all Orders and Ranks, and none are better than they

they ought to be: But this much I dare venture to aſſert, that none are more blameleſs in their Manners than the *diſſenting* Miniſters; none more tenacious of preſerving ſuch a Reputation as becomes a *Chriſtian* Miniſter. And if in this Reſpect none are happier than the diſſenting Congregations (which I believe will hardly be diſputed) the reaſon is, becauſe they receive no Man as a *Paſtor* 'till he has firſt approved himſelf to them to be every way qualified for the ſacred Office. Were it ſo in the eſtabliſhed Church, were no ſpiritual Guide obtruded upon, none received by any Pariſh, but ſuch whoſe Lives and Morals, and Senſe, and Learning were unexceptionable, how much more flouriſhing would the State of Religion be, than, alaſs! it now is?

The beſt Things hitherto writen by the Champions of the *eſtabliſhed* Church, in Defence of their Power, Prerogatives, and Preſcriptions, appear to me to be very weak, ſuperficial, and fallacious; while the Motives for diſſenting from ſuch a Church, are ſupported by the ſtrongeſt Proofs that *Reaſon*, and the ſacred *Scriptures* afford. Conſequently the Church cannot give ſuch an Anſwer to the Objections of the Diſſenters, as will appear ſatisfactory to a rational and

ſincere Chriſtian; and I defy any one to ſhew when and where they ever have been anſwer'd. I am very ſure they never can be anſwer'd: No, not if the Scriptures themſelves could be proved to have no Weight in the Diſpute (which is abſurd and impoſſible;) for ſtill Nature, Juſtice, Reaſon, and the invincible Force of Truth, muſt eternally remain in Oppoſition to ſuch a Church.

I will now, Sir, conclude this Epiſtle with a few general and curſory Reflections on the Church of *England*, without coming to Particulars, leaving the Examination of the ſeveral of Parts her Syſtem to my next, which I intend to make a long one.

And firſt, it is my Opinion that a Church eſtabliſh'd on ſuch a Foundation as the Church of *England* is, cannot always ſtand, becauſe, as I hope hereafter to make appear, it is not eſtabliſh'd on the only true Foundation in the World, *viz.* The Chriſtian Syſtem: While, on the other Hand, the Church of the Proteſtant Diſſenters, at leaſt ſuch of them as I am proud to join myſelf with, muſt endure to Eternity, becauſe founded on, and ſupported by the Scriptures; thoſe ſacred Scriptures which the Church of ENGLAND *knoweth not*, or ſhe would never have choſen

to

to place her chief Dependance on Human Authorities, *Teaching for Doctrines* the *Commandments* (the arbitrary unreaſonable Commandments) *of Men.*

The eſtabliſhed Church ſtill retains a great many of the Superſtitions, Ceremonies, Cuſtoms, and even Principles of Popery, which are irrational and monſtrous, and from which the Diſſenters are intirely free, and do juſtly abhor. She hath ſubverted the Order of the Chriſtian-Prieſthood, turned the miniſterial Character from it's Apoſtolical Inſtitution, from its original Humility, Meekneſs and Simplicity, into a political perſecuting, lordly, temporal Character. She hath departed from the Doctrines of *Chriſt* and his Apoſtles, who have declared, that what they taught was ſufficient, and forbid us to add any Thing thereto. On the other Hand, the Diſſenters have reduced every thing to the Scripture Standard; which is not only ſhewing a proper Obedience to their Lord and Maſter Jeſus Chriſt, but 'tis the beſt Support of Reaſon, Morality, and Liberty, and has the greateſt Tendency to extirpate Superſtition, Perſecution, and Slavery out of the World. The *Church* refers us to Synods, Creeds, Acts of Parliament, arbitrary Degrees of the Civil Magiſtrate, Arti-

cles and Canons invented and preſcribed by Men who had no authority from God; to theſe, I ſay, the *Church* refers us for a Sanction to her Doctrines, while the Diſſenters direct us to the ſacred Writings, appealing to the Ordinances of God himſelf, and to no other Ordinances, for the Truth of their Principles, and the Rectitude of their Practice.

In Conformity to this Direction, I have diligently applied myſelf to ſearching the Scriptures, which have, indeed, intirely confirm'd me in what you call my Apoſtacy. I find that the Ordinances of God, and the Bleſſed Jeſus, the Author of Chriſtianity, do indiſpenſibly oblige me to ſeperate from ſuch a Church as *ſome* of our Anceſtors have thought proper to Eſtabliſh by Civil Powers, and to preſcribe to us by the Authority of Laws which Chriſtianity knows nothing of, nor admits of any ſuch Interpoſition of Temporal Authority.

I hope, Sir, in my next, to give you ample and ſatisfactory Proofs of the Truth of all the foregoing Aſſertions. Nor need you be ſurpriz'd at my Confidence, in taking upon myſelf a Taſk which it may be thought requires a maſterly Pen, and great learning: But in Truth, Sir, I do not think ſo. The

Chriſtian

Chriſtian Syſtem is plain and ſimple, though its Truths are glorious and ſublime; and as it was deſigned for the univerſal Benefit of Mankind, ſo it is wiſely adapted to every common Capacity, and needs no other Help, to a right underſtanding of it, than an honeſt Heart, and entire Diſmiſſion of all Prejudices, all ignorant Attachments to party Principles, and then we ſhall find no want of more learning than the Knowledge of our Mother Tongue, into which that we have the Holy Scriptures tranſlated, may be rank'd among our greateſt national Bleſſings.

'Tis true, Sir, that before my Underſtanding was enlightned by that bright Luminary of the true Chriſtian Church, Mr. *Foſter*, I knew nothing of real Chriſtianity, nor of the Scriptures; but that I do now underſtand, at leaſt, as much of them as is neceſſary for informing me how to think, and act, and worſhip my God, in ſuch a Manner as becomes a Rational Creature and a Chriſtian, is what I hope will yet appear to, and be allowed by, even you, Sir: You, who have ſo much the Advantage of me in Point of Learning, and whoſe Profeſſion and more advanced Age have furniſh'd with ſuch ſuperiour Opportunities for ſtudying the lively Oracles of God.

But

But as the Specimens I intend to give you, of my improvement in Scriptural Knowledge, will require ſome Regularity and Connection, I ſhall reſerve all for my next, which I ſhall ſpare no Pains to execute as well as my ſmall Abilities will allow. My every thought, every Sentiment ſhall be laid before you, without palliating or diguiſing the leaſt Tittle of what may occur to my Memory; and you may expect a particular and Impartial State and Detail of the Differences ſubſiſting between the eſtabliſhed Church, and that of the Diſſenters: Of all I have to urge againſt the One, and in Favour of the Others. In order to this, I intend to review the moſt capital Pieces of Controverſy, that I may be the better enabled to methodiſe and compleat my Syſtem, by adding, to my own, the Obſervations of Gentlemen of ſuperiour Abilities, and more extenſive Reading. But leſt you ſhould think this an unneceſſary Employment, after ſo many good Pieces have already been done and publiſhed on both Sides; leſt you ſhould be tempted to cenſure me as an Impertinent Medler in eccleſiaſtical Affairs, give me Leave, Sir, by way of Apology both for what is paſt, and what is yet to come, to offer theſe three my principal Reaſons to your Conſideration.

First

First, I am induced to this Attempt, for the Sake of juſtifying myſelf, and making it appear that in ſeparating from, and openly avowing my Diſapprobation of the eſtabliſh'd Church, I have acted as every rational and conſcientious Chriſtian ought to act, who has received the ſame Conviction that I have received. Secondly, for the Sake of gaining ſtill further Information on ſome Points which I cannot be too perfectly acquainted with, and into which I may, probably, receive ſome new Lights, by farther Inquiry, and by being obliged to connect my own Thoughts with thoſe of other Perſons, and to caſt the whole into ſome regular Order. Thirdly, for the Sake of giving you, Sir, an Opportunity, by an ample Examination of my Notions and Sentiments, of confuting and rectifying them, if they are Erroneous.

Excuſe, dear Sir, the Length of this apologetical Epiſtle, and believe me, whatever Change my Religious Sentiments have undergone, to be ſtill, and ever,

Your moſt dutiful and affectionate Kinſman,

G. B.

FINIS.

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